DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 127 404 UD 016 249

AUTHOR Cox, Richard; And Others
TITLE Stability of Self-Concept, Significant Others and Socio-Economic Level.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; Cultural Differences; Family Structure; Grade 4; Grade 8; Grade 12; *Individual Differences; Instructional Program Divisions; *Measurement Techniques; One Parent Family; *Role Perception; *Self Concept; Sex Differences; *Social Differences; Socioeconomic Status
IDENTIFIERS Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

A definition of self concept as the individual's perception of how he is perceived by others whom he believes to be significant (important) was used as a basis for defining and assessing self concept in the present study. A number of questions associated with development and the stability of self concept were examined. These include: (1) the extent to which self concept differs as a function of socioeconomic level, an individual's perception of significant others, and the interaction of cultural level and an individual's perception of significant others; (2) the extent to which self concept of an individual varies as a function of his perception of significant others; (3) how the self concept of an individual varies as a function of his sex, age, and the interactions of his significant other and sex and age; and, (4) how self concept varies as a function of the absence of one parent. The subjects for this study were 458 students in grades, 4, 8, and 12 selected at random from two school districts in central Pennsylvania. Two measuring instruments, the Referent Questionnaire and the Student Opinion Poll, were administered. An analysis of variance of self concept data was completed using three factorial designs. That school age subjects tend to have the most positive self concepts when they are (1) socioeconomically advantaged and have parents as chosen significant others or (2) socioeconomically disadvantaged and have peers as the chosen significant others was among the major findings. (Author/JM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED127404

Abstract

Stability of Self-Concept, Significant Others

and Socio-economic Level

Richard Cox, J. William Moore, and William E. Hauck

Bucknell University

Self-concept level and stability was examined as a function of cultural advantage level, sex, and self-esteem reference. Subjects were first classified by grade level, cultural level, and source of self-esteem, parents or peers. An ANOVA of self-concept questionnaire data was completed. Results indicated that disadvantaged students' self-concept was greater when peers were considered to be significant others, while high self-concept advantaged students had parents as the reference group. Self-concept tended to be stable except when self was the significant referent. In this case, self-concept improved with age. The self-concept of females tended to be lower than for males.

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

UD 016 249

Stability of Self-Concept, Significant Others

and Socio-economic Level

The notion of self-concept continues to intrigue educators for a number of reasons, including the relatively high correlation obtained between measures of self-concept and academic performance (Brookoner, et al., 1966). Yet, in spite of the interest, the research related to the identification of those factors which contribute to the development of self-concept, and the stability of self-concept remains inconclusive. Deutch and Soloman (1959) in their research, stress the importance to the individual of the credibility of his referent. Simon and Bernstein (1971) suggest that persons with high esteem are more likely to believe that people they like reciprocate their feelings and Matteson (1974) related the self-esteem of children to both their ability to communicate with their parents and the level of satisfaction of the marriage relation of the parents. These investigations suggest that self-concept may be, in part, a function of the individual perception of an individual's relation to others whom he believes to be important or significant.

The relation of socio-economic status to self-concept is not well established. Zechel and Moses (1971) showed that children of low socio-economic status scored higher in self-concept than middle-socio-economic status children. The results of Deutsch, et al., (1960) were just the opposite of Zechel and Moses and McDaniels (1967) found no differences.

Many of the research findings indicate that self-concept increases with age (Donaldson, 1974; Grant, 1966). Others such as Engel (1959) found self-concept to be stable. As with the research involving factors which may influence self-concept, the research on the stability of self-concept is far from being conclusive.

One reason that the research on self-concept has not been more productive is that the definition used most often as a basis of evaluating it has not embodied an explanation of the factors which influence the self-concept. For example, a measure of self-concept commonly used in research is based on an evaluation of individual's estimate of his own self worth (Rogers, 1951-66). A definition which may be more productive for research purposes is one which defines self-concept as "the individual's perception of how he is perceived by others whom he believes to be significant (important)," (Moore and Hauck, 1973). This definition is similar to Mead's (1934) definition of self-esteem. This definition was used as a basis for defining and assessing self-concept in the present study which examined a number of questions associated with the development and the stability of self-concept. These include:

1. To what extent does self-concept differ as a function of: (a) socio-economic level; (b) an individual's perception of significant others, i.e., others whom he believes to be important; and (c) the interaction of cultural level and an individual's perception of significant others?

2. To what extent does the self-concept of an individual vary as a function of his perception of significant others?

3. How does the self-concept of an individual vary as a function of his: (a) sex; (b) age; and (c) the interactions of his significant other and sex and age?

4. How does self-concept vary as a function of the absence of one parent?

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 458 students in grades 4, 8 and 12 selected at random from two school districts in Central Pennsylvania. The socio-economic environment varied in both districts with students representing all levels of SES. For the purposes of this study, subjects were classified into two groups, the disadvantaged which contained subjects who qualified for the subsidized lunch program offered by the school district, the advantaged group did not qualify.

Materials

The materials were two measuring instruments, the Referent Questionnaire (RQ) and the Student Opinion Poll (SOP). Both instruments were constructed by the investigator. The RQ identified the "significant others" of the subjects in the study. It contains ten items with three choices for each item. An example of an item from the RQ is:

3. The person whose opinion of me is most important is . . . (Circle one.)
   (a) one or both of my parents
   (b) one of my classmates
   (c) myself

The responses to the RQ classified subjects into one of three significant other categories, parent, peer, or self.

The SOP was designed to measure self-concept in general and with respect to the significant other of the respondent. The SOP consists of 42 items calling for a response on a rating scale from 1, "rarely like me," to 5, "most often true of me." Each item identified a subject's self-concept as his perception of the opinions of himself held by his significant other. The SOP produces a total self-concept score and three separate sub-scale scores, each of which

measures self-concept in terms of the significant other of the respondent. An example of each type of significant other item is the following; the referent, which does not appear on the SOP, is in parentheses:

9. My parents think that I am an important person. (parent)

20. I think that I am an important person. (self)

40. The most important kids in my class think that I am an important person. (peer)

Design and Procedure

Three factorial designs were used with these dimensions: (a) significant other (peer or parent), sex, and grade; (b) significant other (peer or parent, grade, and SES (advantaged or disadvantaged); and (c) significant other (peer or parent), sex, and parent presence, i.e., living with both or with one parent.

The RQ and the SOP were administered during the regularly scheduled classroom times.

Results

Unless otherwise indicated, the dependent variable for all analyses was self-concept as measured by the student opinion questionnaire developed for this study. An unweighted means analysis of variance for unequal ns (Winer, 1971) was used to analyze all data.

In the first analysis, subjects within each grade level were stratified on two levels of significant others and two socioeconomic levels. The ANOVA results indicated a significant interaction effect for significant others and socio-economic status, $F(1,409) = 4.53$, $p < .05$. A Newman-Keuls analysis applied to the interaction means shown in Table 1 indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) in self-concept between the means of: (a) the advantaged, parent group and the advantaged, peer group; and (b) the peer, advantaged and the peer, disadvantaged groups. Advantaged subjects display a more positive self-concept when parents are the preferred referent; disadvantaged subjects have more positive self-concepts than the advantaged when peers are the preferred referent.

Insert Table 1 about here

For the second analysis, subjects within each grade level were stratified on two levels of significant others, peers and parents, and two levels of sex. The ANOVA results indicated statistical significance for the main effect of significant others, $F(1,409) = 6.34$, $p < .05$. A mean self-concept of 151.58 for the group in which parent was a significant other indicated a more positive self-concept than the mean of 140.46 for the peer significant other group. Each of three subscales of the student opinion questionnaire was used as a dependent variable in the significant other x sex x grade design. One subscale measured self-concept with respect to peers as the referent, another measured with respect

to parents as the referent, and the third measured with respect to self as the referent.

In the three sub-scale analyses, two significant sources of variance were identified. With self-concept measured in regard to parents, statistical significance was obtained for the source, significant others, $F(1,409) = 15.14$, $p < .01$. The self-concept mean of 51.44 for the parent significant other group indicated a more positive self-concept than the peer significant other group with a mean of 44.32. When self-concept was measured with respect to self, significance was attained for grade level, $F(2,409) = 4.70$, $p < .01$. A Neuman-Keuls analysis indicated that the self-concept of the fourth grade was significantly different ($p < .05$) from both the eighth and twelfth grades which did not differ from each other. The mean self-concept for the fourth grade, 43.48, was lower than the means for the other two grades, 47.27 for eighth grade and 48.45 for twelfth grade. When self is the referent for determining self-concepts, significant others appear to make little difference in self-concept, but self-concept becomes more positive with increasing age.

A final analysis was completed in which subjects were stratified on the significant other dimension, peers or parents and sex, and compared in terms of the presence of only one or both parents in the home. The dependent variable in this case was self-concept as determined by using parents as a referent. The results of an ANOVA indicated a significant interaction effect for significant others, presence of parents, and sex, $F(1,413) = 6.44$, $p < .01$. A Neuman-Keuls analysis applied to the interaction means shown in Table 2 indicates that for males with peers as referents, a significant difference ($p < .05$) in self-concept exists between those living with both parents and those living with one. The more positive self-concept existed for males living with both parents. Conversely, for females with peers as referents, there was a significant difference

($p < .05$) also in the parent present dimension; however, females living with both parents displayed a lower self-concept than the more positive self-concept of females living with one parent.

When the significant other was parents, significant differences ($p < .05$) occurred between the two types of parent present groups for both males and females. Males and females who live with both parents, have more positive self-concepts than those who live with one parent when parents as opposed to peers are viewed as significant others.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

One of the several interesting findings of this research was the observation that advantaged subjects have a more positive self-concept, when parents are the preferred referents, while disadvantaged subjects have a more positive self-concept than the advantaged when peers are the preferred referents. These findings are consistent with the research of Matterson (1974) which suggests that parents who communicate effectively with their children or have a good marriage relation, have children with positive self-concepts. Specifically, it may be that advantaged children are more likely to perceive their parents as significant others, perhaps because they may communicate better and have a happier home life than their counterparts from disadvantaged homes. Further, it may be that disadvantaged parents have lower self-concepts than advantaged parents. If this is the case, one could suggest that disadvantaged students, who consider their parents to be the significant others, tend to model their parents' behavior. They would probably model the parents'

behavior less if peers are chosen as the referent, thus increasing the probability of a higher self-concept.

It is interesting to note that when subjects were compared on a socio-economic level, no differences in self-concept were observed. It was only when the interaction of socio-economic level and significant others were considered that differences were observed. The failure to include significant others as a source of variance along with socio-economic status may explain why the findings of past research relating socio-economic level and self-concept has not been more consistent.

The importance of utilizing a definition involving significant others as a source of variance in determining self-concept, was also evidenced by the fact that the main effect of significant others resulted in a more positive self-concept when parents, as opposed to peers, were chosen as significant others. The analysis of the sub-scale with parents as the significant other, provides further support for the conclusion.

The finding in the analysis of the sub-scales that: (a) the level of self-concept of four graders was lower than that of either eighth or twelfth grade subjects who chose self as the significant other; and (b) the level of self-concept did not differ as a function of grade level for the other sub-scales is interesting for a number of reasons. First, the changes in self-concept, where self was the referent, tend to be consistent with both the findings of: (a) Grant (1966) who found that self-concept became more positive with increasing age; and (b) Engel (1959) who found self-concept to be stable with eighth and tenth grade students. It is also of interest because the findings suggest that the stability of self-concept may vary depending on the source of significant others. Specifically, the data would suggest that when parents or peers are the chosen source the self-concept may become stable at a relatively early age.

Only when self is the chosen source, does self-concept appear to be unstable, changing in a positive direction with age.

The observation that: (a) male subjects living with both parents having chosen peers as significant others had a more positive self-concept than males living with one parent; and (b) female subjects living with one parent having chosen peers as referents had the more positive self-concept is not readily explainable in terms of past research. A possible explanation for these data may be subsumed in the following assumptions: (a) subjects tend to select peer groups as significant others more often when there is marital difficulty at home; (b) in the presence of these difficulties, children tend to identify with the parent of the same sex; and (c) when a parent is missing, it most often is the father. From these assumptions, one would predict that the boys' self-concept would decrease if the father is missing, and the girls' would increase when the source of difficulty for her model (mother) was reduced by the absence of the father. The observation that both male and female subjects who had both parents present and who chose parents as significant others had the more positive self-concept, is again consistent with the findings of Matterson (1974) who found that parents with children with low esteem had less satisfying marriages.

In summary, school-aged subjects tend to have the most positive self-concepts when they are either socio-economically advantaged and have parents as chosen significant others or socio-economically disadvantaged and have peers as the chosen significant others. Both male and female subjects have the most positive self-concept when they chose parents who are significant others and when they are from homes where both parents are present. For male and female subjects who chose peers as significant others, males tend to have a more positive self-concept when parents are living together. Female subjects have a more positive self-concept when one parent is missing. Finally, self-concept

appears to be very stable when parents or peers is the significant other, but less stable when self is the referent.

Table 1

Means for Significant Others by Socio-economic Level

	Socio-economic Level	
	Advantaged	Disadvantaged
Peers	138.48	147.22
Parents	153.31	138.48

Table 2

Means for Significant Others by Sex by Parent Presence

Referent	Sex	Parents Presence	
		Both Parents	Missing Parent
Peers	Male	45.94	40.71
	Female	41.89	50.22
Parent	Male	51.00	49.58
	Female	52.67	48.59